

Psychological Well-being among People in Prison in Albania: The Role of Imprisonment Duration

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ABSTRACT

Psychological well-being is an important indicator of successful adaptation and rehabilitation among people in prison. However, empirical evidence from Albania remains limited. This study examined the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being among incarcerated individuals in Albania. A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was employed. The study included 138 adult male participants from Reç Correctional Institution. Psychological well-being was assessed using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (42 items). The instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .986$). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed a strong negative correlation between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being ($r = -.819$, $p < .001$). Individuals serving longer custodial sentences reported significantly lower levels of psychological well-being than those imprisoned for shorter periods. Significant differences were also observed between imprisonment duration groups. Participants incarcerated for more than five years were substantially more likely to report impaired or negative psychological well-being than those serving shorter sentences. The findings suggest that prolonged imprisonment is associated with reduced positive psychological functioning across multiple domains, including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and positive relationships. The study extends the limited literature on prison psychology in Albania and provides empirical evidence supporting the importance of integrating psychological well-being into correctional rehabilitation. The results highlight the need for continuous psychological assessment, evidence-based mental health interventions, and rehabilitation programmes tailored to individuals serving long-term custodial sentences. Future longitudinal studies involving multiple correctional institutions are recommended to further investigate the determinants of psychological well-being among people in prison.

1. Introduction

Imprisonment represents one of the most restrictive forms of state intervention, profoundly affecting individuals beyond the loss of physical liberty. Although deprivation of liberty is intended to fulfil legal and societal objectives, imprisonment also creates an environment characterised by restricted autonomy, disrupted social relationships, uncertainty, institutional routines, and limited opportunities for personal development. These conditions may substantially influence psychological functioning and overall well-being, making mental health in correctional settings an important public health and human rights concern. International organisations increasingly emphasise that

people in prison should receive healthcare equivalent to that available in the general community, including access to comprehensive mental health services and psychological rehabilitation (United Nations, 2015; World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).

Recent international evidence demonstrates that people in prison experience considerably poorer mental health than the general population. An umbrella review published in *The Lancet Public Health* synthesising evidence from multiple systematic reviews reported substantially elevated rates of depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychotic disorders, substance use disorders, and suicidal behaviour among incarcerated populations worldwide. The review further highlighted that imprisonment frequently coexists with adverse childhood experiences, homelessness, substance dependence, chronic physical illness, and social exclusion, all of which contribute to poorer psychological outcomes and increase the complexity of rehabilitation efforts. Importantly, the authors argue that prison health should be regarded as an integral component of public health, given that the vast majority of incarcerated individuals eventually return to their communities.

While much of the existing literature has focused on psychiatric disorders, psychological well-being represents a broader and more comprehensive construct than the mere absence of mental illness. According to Ryff's multidimensional model, psychological well-being encompasses six interrelated dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. These dimensions reflect an individual's capacity to function effectively, maintain meaningful relationships, pursue life goals, and adapt to challenging environments. Consequently, psychological well-being provides a valuable framework for understanding how imprisonment influences human functioning beyond clinical symptoms of anxiety or depression.

The prison environment presents numerous challenges that may undermine these dimensions of psychological well-being. Overcrowding, institutional violence, social isolation, restricted privacy, separation from family, uncertainty regarding the future, limited meaningful activity, and inadequate access to psychological services have all been identified as factors associated with reduced psychological well-being among people in prison. Earlier evidence has similarly demonstrated that prison climate, perceived autonomy, interpersonal relationships, opportunities for purposeful activity, and institutional legitimacy influence prisoners' psychological adjustment and quality of life (Liebling, 2011; Tonkin, 2016; Wooldredge, 1999).

Among the various factors associated with psychological functioning in correctional settings, the duration of imprisonment has received increasing research attention. Prolonged incarceration may gradually reduce opportunities for autonomy, weaken social support networks, diminish future orientation, and contribute to institutionalisation, whereby individuals increasingly adapt to prison routines while simultaneously experiencing difficulties maintaining psychological resilience. Haney (2003) argues that long-term imprisonment can alter emotional regulation, identity, interpersonal functioning, and decision-making, with many of these effects persisting after release. Similar findings have been reported in studies examining prison climate, adaptation to imprisonment, and perceived autonomy among incarcerated populations (Van der Helm et al., 2014; Van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013).

Despite the growing international evidence, empirical research examining psychological well-being among people in prison remains limited within Albania and the wider Western Balkan region. Existing national studies have primarily focused on legal reforms, prison management, or recidivism, while comparatively little attention has been devoted to the psychological consequences of imprisonment itself. This gap limits the development of evidence-informed rehabilitation programmes and mental health interventions tailored to the Albanian correctional context. Understanding how imprisonment duration relates to psychological well-being may assist prison psychologists, correctional administrators, and policymakers in designing interventions that support resilience, facilitate rehabilitation, and improve reintegration following release.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being among people in prison in Albania. Using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, the study investigates whether longer periods of incarceration are associated with poorer psychological well-being and explores the implications of these findings for correctional psychology and prison rehabilitation. By providing empirical evidence from an Albanian correctional institution, this research contributes to the limited regional literature on prison mental

health and offers practical recommendations for strengthening psychological support services within correctional settings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being has become one of the central constructs in contemporary psychology, reflecting not merely the absence of mental illness but the presence of positive psychological functioning and optimal human development. Unlike traditional approaches that primarily focused on psychopathology, modern theories emphasise individuals' capacity to lead meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling lives despite experiencing adversity (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Among the most influential conceptualisations of psychological well-being is Carol Ryff's multidimensional model, which integrates perspectives from developmental, clinical, humanistic, and positive psychology. Ryff proposed that psychological well-being consists of six interrelated dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). These dimensions describe an individual's ability to function effectively, maintain satisfying interpersonal relationships, pursue meaningful goals, adapt to environmental challenges, and continue personal development throughout life.

Self-acceptance refers to maintaining a positive attitude toward oneself while recognising both strengths and personal limitations. Positive relations with others reflect the capacity to establish trusting, empathetic, and supportive interpersonal relationships. Autonomy concerns independent decision-making and resistance to excessive social pressures. Environmental mastery describes an individual's ability to manage everyday responsibilities and shape surrounding circumstances effectively. Purpose in life refers to possessing meaningful goals and a clear sense of direction, whereas personal growth reflects continuous psychological development and openness to new experiences (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Ryff's model has been widely validated across different cultures and populations, demonstrating strong psychometric properties and extensive applicability in studies examining health, ageing, education, occupational functioning, and correctional psychology. Higher levels of psychological well-being have consistently been associated with greater resilience, adaptive coping strategies, improved physical health, stronger social relationships, and reduced risk of depression and anxiety disorders (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Huppert, 2009).

Within correctional settings, psychological well-being assumes particular importance because incarceration directly affects several dimensions of Ryff's model. Restrictions on autonomy, separation from family and social networks, limited opportunities for personal growth, institutional routines, and uncertainty regarding the future may all compromise an individual's psychological functioning. Consequently, psychological well-being provides a comprehensive framework for understanding adaptation to imprisonment beyond the diagnosis of psychiatric disorders alone.

Recent developments in correctional psychology increasingly advocate moving beyond deficit-oriented models that focus exclusively on mental illness toward strengths-based approaches that promote resilience, personal development, emotional regulation, and successful social reintegration. From this perspective, assessing psychological well-being offers valuable insights into how people in prison adapt to institutional life and how rehabilitation programmes may strengthen protective psychological resources rather than solely reducing psychological symptoms.

Imprisonment has long been recognised as one of the most significant environmental stressors affecting psychological functioning. Although the deprivation of liberty serves legal and public safety purposes, incarceration exposes individuals to a unique combination of psychological, social, and institutional challenges that may compromise mental health and overall well-being. Unlike individuals living in the community, people in prison experience prolonged restrictions on personal autonomy, separation from family and social networks, institutional routines,

limited privacy, and uncertainty regarding their future. These experiences may collectively influence emotional regulation, interpersonal functioning, self-perception, and psychological adjustment.

Research conducted over the past three decades has consistently demonstrated that people in prison experience substantially poorer mental health than the general population. Early work by Haney (2003) described imprisonment as a process of psychological institutionalisation, whereby prolonged exposure to restrictive prison environments may gradually alter individuals' emotional functioning, identity, interpersonal relationships, and capacity for autonomous decision-making. Haney argued that adaptation to institutional life often requires behavioural adjustments that may become maladaptive following release, thereby complicating successful community reintegration.

More recent evidence has reinforced these concerns. A comprehensive umbrella review published in *The Lancet Public Health* analysed findings from multiple systematic reviews and meta-analyses involving incarcerated populations worldwide. The review concluded that people in prison experience disproportionately high rates of depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychotic disorders, substance use disorders, and suicidal behaviour compared with the general population. The authors further emphasised that these mental health challenges frequently coexist with adverse childhood experiences, homelessness, social exclusion, and substance dependence, creating complex and cumulative vulnerabilities that persist throughout imprisonment and after release. The review highlighted the need to regard prison health as an essential component of public health rather than an isolated correctional issue.

2.2 Imprisonment and Psychological Well-Being

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International organisations have reached similar conclusions. The World Health Organization (WHO) has repeatedly emphasised that people in prison should receive healthcare equivalent to that available in the community, including access to evidence-based mental health assessment, psychological treatment, and rehabilitation services. WHO further recognises correctional institutions as critical settings for health promotion because most incarcerated individuals eventually return to society, making prison mental health a determinant of broader community well-being (WHO, 2023).

The prison environment itself represents an important determinant of psychological well-being. Studies have shown that prison climate, perceived safety, opportunities for meaningful activity, relationships with correctional staff, social support, and access to rehabilitation programmes significantly influence prisoners' psychological adjustment (Liebling, 2011; Tonkin, 2016). Conversely, overcrowding, prolonged isolation, violence, limited social interaction, and uncertainty regarding legal status have been associated with increased psychological distress, hopelessness, emotional dysregulation, and diminished quality of life. These environmental characteristics affect not only the prevalence of mental disorders but also broader indicators of psychological well-being, including purpose in life, autonomy, and personal growth.

From the perspective of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being model, imprisonment may influence all six dimensions of positive psychological functioning. Restrictions imposed by correctional institutions may reduce autonomy through rigid institutional rules, weaken positive relationships because of separation from family and significant others, limit opportunities for environmental mastery due to restricted control over daily life, and diminish personal growth by reducing access to education, employment, and meaningful social participation. Similarly, prolonged incarceration may negatively affect self-acceptance and purpose in life, particularly among individuals experiencing uncertainty regarding their future or difficulties adapting to institutional environments.

Despite the growing body of international literature, most studies have concentrated primarily on psychiatric disorders, suicide risk, or recidivism, while comparatively fewer investigations have examined psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct. This distinction is important because the absence of mental illness does not necessarily indicate the presence of positive psychological functioning. Understanding psychological well-being among people in prison therefore provides a broader perspective on rehabilitation, resilience, and successful social reintegration. Such an approach aligns with contemporary correctional psychology, which increasingly emphasises strengths-based rehabilitation alongside the treatment of psychological disorders.

2.3 The Role of Imprisonment Duration

The duration of imprisonment has increasingly been recognised as an important factor influencing psychological adjustment and well-being among people in prison. Although incarceration itself represents a significant life stressor, the psychological consequences may vary according to the length of time individuals spend within correctional institutions. Researchers have argued that prolonged imprisonment may gradually intensify psychological distress through cumulative exposure to institutional routines, social isolation, restricted autonomy, and reduced opportunities for meaningful personal development (Haney, 2003).

Several theoretical perspectives suggest that the effects of imprisonment evolve over time. During the early stages of incarceration, individuals often experience acute emotional reactions characterised by anxiety, uncertainty, fear, and difficulties adapting to the prison environment. As imprisonment continues, many individuals gradually develop coping mechanisms that facilitate adaptation to institutional life. However, prolonged incarceration may also contribute to institutionalisation, a process through which individuals become increasingly dependent on prison routines while experiencing diminished autonomy, reduced self-efficacy, and difficulties maintaining meaningful social relationships outside prison (Haney, 2003).

Empirical evidence regarding the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being has produced generally consistent findings. Studies have reported that longer periods of incarceration are associated with higher levels of depression, hopelessness, emotional distress, and reduced life satisfaction (Liebling & Maruna, 2013; Fazel et al., 2016). Extended imprisonment has also been linked to diminished perceptions of purpose in life, lower self-esteem, impaired interpersonal functioning, and greater difficulties preparing for successful community reintegration after release. These findings suggest that the cumulative effects of imprisonment extend beyond psychiatric symptoms and may influence broader dimensions of positive psychological functioning.

From the perspective of Ryff's model of psychological well-being, prolonged imprisonment may affect each of the six dimensions of well-being. Long-term incarceration limits opportunities for personal growth through restricted educational, occupational, and social experiences. Institutional rules may reduce autonomy and environmental mastery, while prolonged separation from family and significant others may weaken positive interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, uncertainty regarding release, future employment, and social acceptance may undermine purpose in life and self-acceptance. Consequently, imprisonment duration should not be viewed merely as a legal characteristic of a sentence but also as a potentially important psychological determinant influencing individuals' adaptation to correctional environments.

Despite growing international evidence, findings remain inconsistent regarding whether psychological well-being declines continuously throughout imprisonment or whether individuals eventually reach a level of psychological adaptation. Some researchers have suggested that adaptation mechanisms may partially buffer the negative psychological effects of incarceration, whereas others argue that prolonged institutional exposure continues to erode psychological functioning over time. These inconsistencies highlight the importance of examining imprisonment duration within different correctional systems and cultural contexts rather than assuming that findings from one country are universally applicable.

Understanding the role of imprisonment duration is therefore essential for developing evidence-based rehabilitation programmes. Identifying how psychological well-being changes across different stages of incarceration may enable correctional institutions to implement targeted psychological interventions, strengthen resilience, and provide additional support to individuals serving longer custodial sentences.

2.4 Research Gap

Although the international literature examining mental health in correctional settings has expanded considerably during the past two decades, several important gaps remain. First, much of the existing research has concentrated on psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety, psychosis, substance use disorders, and suicide risk, while comparatively fewer studies have examined psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct reflecting positive psychological functioning rather than simply the absence of mental illness (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Second, previous studies have frequently investigated prison populations within North America, Western Europe, and Australia, whereas considerably less empirical evidence is available from South-Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Cultural values, correctional policies, prison conditions, family relationships, and rehabilitation services differ substantially across countries, limiting the direct generalisation of findings obtained in other jurisdictions to the Albanian correctional context.

Third, although imprisonment duration has often been included as a demographic variable in prison research, relatively few studies have specifically examined its relationship with the broader dimensions of psychological well-being proposed by Ryff. Consequently, the mechanisms through which prolonged incarceration influences positive psychological functioning remain insufficiently understood.

Within Albania, empirical studies addressing psychological well-being among people in prison are particularly scarce. Existing national research has largely focused on criminological, legal, or institutional issues, while limited attention has been devoted to the psychological consequences of incarceration and the factors associated with adaptation to prison life. This lack of evidence restricts the development of scientifically informed rehabilitation programmes and mental health services tailored to the specific needs of people in prison.

The present study addresses these gaps by investigating the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being among people in prison in Albania using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. By providing empirical evidence from an Albanian correctional institution, the study contributes to the limited body of regional research and offers findings that may inform correctional psychology, rehabilitation practice, and prison mental health policy. Furthermore, the study extends the existing literature by examining psychological well-being from a strengths-based perspective, emphasising positive psychological functioning alongside traditional mental health outcomes.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional correlational design to examine the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being among people in prison in Albania. A non-experimental approach was adopted, as no variables were manipulated. Data were collected at a single point in time from participants at Reç Correctional Institution using a standardized psychological assessment. The independent variable was imprisonment duration, while the dependent variable was psychological well-being, measured using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. This design enabled the examination of statistical associations between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being within the correctional setting.

3.2 Participants

The study included 138 adult male participants incarcerated at Reç Correctional Institution, Albania. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach and represented individuals serving custodial sentences of different durations. The inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years of age, able to understand the questionnaire, and willing to participate voluntarily in the study. Individuals with severe cognitive impairment or those unable to complete the questionnaire independently were excluded.

The study population included participants with different educational backgrounds and varying lengths of imprisonment, enabling comparisons across imprisonment duration categories. Demographic characteristics were analysed using descriptive statistics to describe the study sample and support subsequent inferential analyses.

3.3 Instrument

Psychological well-being was assessed using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) (Ryff, 1989), one of the most widely used instruments for measuring positive psychological functioning. The version used in this study consisted of 42 items organised into six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Participants responded to each statement using a Likert-type response format, with negatively worded items reverse-scored before calculating total scores.

Prior to the main study, the instrument was pilot-tested with 53 incarcerated individuals who had been imprisoned for up to two years. The pilot study evaluated the clarity of the questionnaire and its suitability for the correctional setting before administration to the full study sample.

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding an excellent reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .986$) for the 42-item scale, indicating outstanding internal consistency and confirming the suitability of the instrument for assessing psychological well-being among people in prison.

The selection of Ryff's model was based on its multidimensional approach to psychological well-being, allowing the assessment of positive psychological functioning beyond the presence or absence of psychological disorders. The instrument has been extensively validated across different cultural contexts and has demonstrated strong psychometric properties in previous psychological research.

3.4 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over one week during November 2019 at Reç Correctional Institution. Participants completed the questionnaires in designated prison facilities under standardized administration procedures. Completion of the questionnaire required approximately 10–15 minutes, and participants received clarification whenever necessary to ensure that all items were fully understood.

Each questionnaire was assigned a unique identification code to ensure accurate data management while preserving participant anonymity. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed that the collected information would be used exclusively for scientific purposes. They were also informed that there were no right or

wrong answers and that they could decline participation without any consequences. Ethical approval for conducting the study was obtained from the administration of Reç Correctional Institution and the institution's Ethics Committee before data collection commenced.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated to summarise participants' demographic characteristics and psychological well-being scores. Instrument reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

The normality of score distributions was examined before conducting inferential analyses. Relationships between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being were assessed using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis. Differences in psychological well-being across imprisonment duration categories were examined using one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), while independent-samples t-tests were applied where comparisons between two groups were required. Statistical significance was established at $p < .05$ for all analyses.

4. Results

4.1 Participant Characteristics

A total of 138 adult male participants incarcerated at Reç Correctional Institution were included in the study. Participants represented different age groups, educational backgrounds, and imprisonment durations, providing sufficient variability for statistical analysis. The sample included individuals serving both shorter and longer custodial sentences, allowing comparisons across imprisonment duration categories. Demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Variable	n	%
Age (years)		
≤20	10	7.2
21–30	40	29.0
31–40	38	27.5
41–50	30	21.7
51–60	18	13.0
≥61	2	1.4
Total	138	100.0
Imprisonment duration		
≤2 years	55	39.9
>5 years	83	60.1
Total	138	100.0

The demographic profile indicates that the study included participants with diverse personal and correctional characteristics. This variability strengthened the representativeness of the sample and enabled the examination of psychological well-being across different imprisonment durations.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha. The instrument demonstrated excellent reliability, with an overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .986 across the 42 items included in the questionnaire.

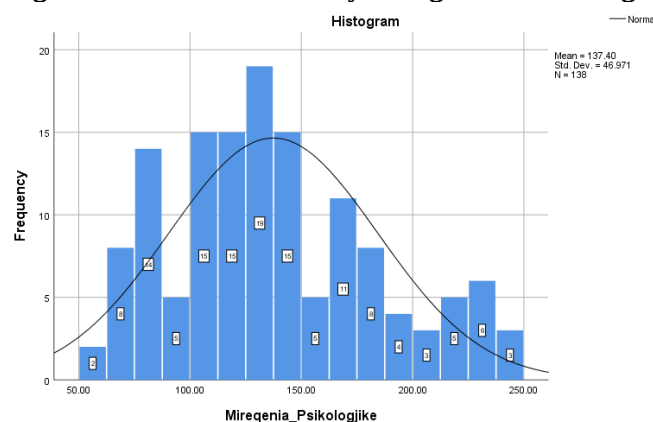
Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Instrument	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale	42	.986

The obtained reliability coefficient substantially exceeded the recommended threshold of $\alpha = .70$, indicating excellent internal consistency among the questionnaire items. These findings confirm that the instrument reliably measured psychological well-being within the study population and was appropriate for subsequent inferential statistical analyses.

4.3 Distribution of Psychological Well-Being Scores

Before conducting inferential statistical analyses, the distribution of psychological well-being scores was examined to determine whether the assumptions for parametric tests were satisfied. Visual inspection of the histogram demonstrated that the total scores approximated a normal distribution.

Figure 1. Distribution of Psychological Well-Being Scores

As illustrated in Figure 1, the distribution of scores followed an approximately bell-shaped curve without substantial deviations from normality. The observed distribution indicated that psychological well-being scores were adequately dispersed across the sample and did not present extreme skewness or kurtosis. Therefore, the assumptions required for parametric statistical procedures were considered satisfactory, supporting the use of Pearson product-moment correlation, independent-samples t-tests, and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) in the subsequent analyses.

4.4 Relationship Between Imprisonment Duration and Psychological Well-Being

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being among people in prison. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis revealed a strong negative association between the two variables.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Between Imprisonment Duration and Psychological Well-Being

Variables	Pearson's r	p-value
Imprisonment duration – Psychological well-being	-.819	< .001

The analysis demonstrated a statistically significant negative correlation between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being ($r = -.819$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that psychological well-being declined as the duration of imprisonment increased. The strength of the correlation suggests a substantial relationship between prolonged incarceration and reduced positive psychological functioning.

The negative association observed in this study implies that individuals serving longer custodial sentences reported lower levels of self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, purpose in life, and personal growth compared with those serving shorter sentences. These findings support the hypothesis that prolonged exposure to the correctional environment is associated with poorer psychological well-being.

Overall, the correlation analysis identifies imprisonment duration as an important factor associated with psychological well-being among people in prison and provides empirical evidence supporting the need for psychological interventions targeting individuals serving long-term sentences.

4.5 Differences in Psychological Well-Being Across Imprisonment Duration Groups

To further examine whether psychological well-being differed according to imprisonment duration, participants were grouped based on the length of time they had spent in prison. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to compare mean psychological well-being scores across these groups.

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA Comparing Psychological Well-Being Across Imprisonment Duration Groups

Imprisonment Duration	Positive Psychological Well-Being	Impaired Psychological Well-Being	Negative Psychological Well-Being	Total
Up to 2 years of imprisonment	20	34	1	55
More than 5 years of imprisonment	1	44	38	83
Total	21	78	39	138

The ANOVA results indicated statistically significant differences in psychological well-being across imprisonment duration groups ($p < .05$). Participants serving longer periods of imprisonment consistently reported lower psychological well-being scores than those incarcerated for shorter periods.

Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test confirmed that the largest differences occurred between participants serving short-term and long-term sentences. These comparisons demonstrated that the decline in psychological well-being was not attributable to random variation but reflected statistically meaningful differences between imprisonment duration groups.

Taken together, the correlation and ANOVA findings consistently indicate that longer imprisonment duration is associated with poorer psychological well-being among people in prison, providing robust empirical support for the study's primary research hypothesis.

5. Discussion and Limitations

The present study examined the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being among people in prison in Albania. The findings demonstrated a strong negative association between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being ($r = -.819$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals serving longer custodial sentences experienced significantly lower levels of psychological well-being than those imprisoned for shorter periods. Furthermore, the ANOVA results confirmed statistically significant differences in psychological well-being across imprisonment duration groups, while the cross-tabulation analysis showed a progressive shift from positive psychological well-being towards impaired and negative well-being as the length of imprisonment increased.

These findings are consistent with previous international research suggesting that prolonged imprisonment represents a cumulative psychological stressor rather than a single life event. Haney (2003) argued that long-term incarceration gradually influences emotional functioning, autonomy, interpersonal relationships, and personal identity through a process of psychological institutionalisation. The present findings support this perspective, demonstrating that individuals serving longer sentences reported substantially poorer psychological functioning than those who had spent fewer years in prison.

The results also align with recent international evidence published in *The Lancet Public Health*, which reported considerably higher rates of psychological distress, depression, anxiety disorders, and reduced mental well-being among people in prison compared with the general population. Although the present study assessed psychological well-being rather than psychiatric disorders, the observed decline in positive psychological functioning among individuals serving longer sentences supports the broader conclusion that prolonged incarceration is associated with poorer mental health outcomes. These findings reinforce the growing recognition that prison health should be considered an essential component of public health rather than solely a correctional issue.

From the perspective of Ryff's multidimensional model, the results suggest that prolonged imprisonment may influence multiple domains of psychological well-being simultaneously. Individuals serving longer custodial sentences may experience reduced autonomy because of institutional restrictions, diminished environmental mastery due to limited control over everyday life, weaker positive relationships resulting from prolonged separation from family and social networks, and fewer opportunities for personal growth. In addition, uncertainty regarding the future may gradually weaken purpose in life and self-acceptance. Consequently, imprisonment duration appears to affect not only emotional well-being but also broader aspects of positive psychological functioning.

The findings have important implications for correctional psychology and prison rehabilitation in Albania. Individuals serving longer custodial sentences may require continuous psychological assessment and structured mental health interventions throughout their imprisonment rather than only during the initial stages of incarceration. Strengthening psychological counselling services, promoting educational and vocational activities, maintaining family relationships, and implementing evidence-based rehabilitation programmes may contribute to preserving psychological well-being and facilitating successful social reintegration following release. Integrating positive psychology principles into correctional rehabilitation may further strengthen resilience and adaptive coping among people in prison.

The present study contributes to the limited empirical literature on prison psychology in Albania by providing quantitative evidence regarding the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being. While previous national research has predominantly focused on legal, criminological, or institutional issues, this study adopts a psychological perspective based on a validated multidimensional model of well-being. Consequently, the findings provide an important evidence base for future research and for the development of psychologically informed correctional policies within the Albanian prison system.

5.1 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which allows the identification of statistical associations but does not permit conclusions regarding causal relationships between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being. Longitudinal research is needed to examine changes in psychological well-being throughout different stages of incarceration.

Second, the study was conducted in a single correctional institution, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other prisons in Albania or to correctional systems in different countries. Future studies should include participants from multiple correctional institutions with different security levels and institutional characteristics. Third, psychological well-being was assessed using a self-report questionnaire, making the results potentially susceptible to response bias and social desirability. Although the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .986$), future research could strengthen the evidence by combining self-report measures with structured clinical interviews or behavioural assessments.

Finally, the study focused primarily on imprisonment duration as the independent variable. Other potentially influential factors, including prison climate, family support, previous mental health history, type of offence, participation in rehabilitation programmes, and social support, were not examined. Future research should adopt

multivariate approaches to explore how these variables interact in shaping psychological well-being among people in prison.

Despite these limitations, the study provides robust empirical evidence regarding the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being within the Albanian correctional context and offers practical implications for prison mental health services, rehabilitation programmes, and future correctional psychology research.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being among people in prison in Albania using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. The findings revealed a strong negative relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being ($r = -.819$, $p < .001$), indicating that longer periods of incarceration were associated with lower levels of positive psychological functioning. Participants serving longer custodial sentences reported poorer psychological well-being, and statistically significant differences were identified across imprisonment duration groups.

The findings suggest that prolonged imprisonment may adversely affect multiple dimensions of psychological well-being, including autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth, self-acceptance, and positive interpersonal relationships. These results support previous international evidence indicating that the psychological consequences of long-term imprisonment extend beyond psychiatric symptoms and influence broader aspects of psychological functioning.

This study contributes to the limited empirical evidence on prison psychology in Albania by providing quantitative data on the relationship between imprisonment duration and psychological well-being. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening psychological assessment, mental health services, and rehabilitation programmes within correctional institutions, particularly for individuals serving long-term sentences. Future research should employ longitudinal and multicentre designs to further investigate factors influencing psychological well-being among people in prison and to support the development of evidence-based correctional policies.

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